

A revised chronology of Cyrus the Great prior to his Babylonian takeover of 539 BC

Khashayar Bahari, Tehran, Aug. 25, 2023; revised 27 November

An Abstract of a text by the author, recently published in *Persian*, entitled *On the authenticity of Pasargadae inscriptions*.

Presentation here is kept to a minimum; references to ancient sources have been left for the original text; and a fair mastery of primary sources over Cyrus the great, concerning his chronology from 554 to 539BC is assumed. This is the essence of a chapter over the Akkadian sources on Cyrus, leaving a “shift” rather than a reshuffling of appropriate years of his early chronology as inevitable; making the beginning of his reign over both the Persians and Medes at 554, the Lydian annexation at 551/50 BC (the year of fall of Sardis as implied from the “first” Greek chronicle, that of Parus, being later adopted explicitly in the so-called *Tabula Iliaca*), followed by the 547 campaign of Arminia/*Urashtu*, 545-43 of central Asia, and 539 of Babylonia. Strikingly, in addition to ancient sources, the prominent evidence behind this conclusion is Archaeological elements of Pasargadae itself, which is free of any sort of Babylonian element, adopted in the latter part of the reign of Cyrus at *Tol-e Ajory* in Persepolis nearby.

The key element aiming at lifting the ambiguities shrouded the chronology of Cyrus the Great is putting aside reconciling pairs of primary sources; namely ⁽¹⁾ avoiding to attach the Nabonidus chronicle’s 6th year clause with his Sippar cylinder evidence on Cyrus Median campaign by assuming an unjustified 3-year-long rising of Cyrus up to the fall of Astyages, and ⁽²⁾ avoiding to identify Cyrus 547BC campaign, as reflected in the 9th year clause of the chronicle, with the fall of Sardis and toppling of Croesus. The confusion reflected in “late” chronographers’ date of fall of Sardis is obviated unexpectedly by a clear Archaeological evidence of Pasargadae wherein no trace whatsoever of Babylonian Architecture element appears, while a recently discovered evidence of Babylonian [the Ishtar-Gate] glazed-brick Architecture of *Tol-e Ajory*, a site of Persepolitan nearby, points to a “marginally close to end” state of Pasargadae constructions when Cyrus was about to proceed for Babylon. Coupled with an “immediately-adopted-looking” Ionian Architecture at Pasargadae following the collapse of Medes, these shift the “accession-year” of Cyrus, “king of the Medes and Persians”, to not later than 554/3 BC, the year implied from Sippar text. Yet the Babylonian chronicles, as that of Nabonidus, were “domestic-official” documents of superior precision, not usually involved with the alien affairs and naming their kings such as Astyages (while his father, Kyaxares, has been included in the so-called “Fall of Nineveh” chronicle just due to him as being an ally of Nabopolassar). The 6th year clause of Nabonidus chronicle does *not* mention the defeat of Astyages in the usual sense; as three events of clear separations of maybe several months [Astyages war with the Persians; the revolt of the Medians against him and the fall of Ecbatana in particular], have been listed successively, but, contrary to the chronicle’s tradition, *without* naming the month of occurrence [The beginning phrase of the event is broken and an assumed “sixth-year” of the clause is merely conjectured, as the next clause begins with the phrase “seventh-year”]. Thus it should be a “later” report of the Median collapse, likely originated from Nabonidus own religious diversion in Tema from Marduk to that of Assyrian God, *Sin*; a “late” development reflected in Sippar cylinder and Harran stela, referring to an “early” event. Nabonidus wasn’t apparently inclined to reveal his motivation to leave Babylon for Tema for 10-years; namely his confidence due to collapse of the Medes by Cyrus at least in official documents; leaving its inclusion in his “third-year of Tema” settlement instead of its real “third year after his accession year”, as is stated in the Sippar years later, at 543, after his return to Babylon, with regrets of postponement of *Ehul-hul* rebuilding at Harran. It seems that in his early Teman years he conceived his settlement there with no Babylonian return in prospect, which, however, materializes at 543 with a diversion from Marduk to *Sin* as well as transformation of

the Babylonian new-year from *Nisanu* to 6-months later at *Tashritu*. Sippar doesn't "directly" report the fall of Astyages as it seems from first glance, as the subject of the episode is the restoration of temple of *Sin* at Harran, an impossible task in the accession-year [556BC] due to its occupation by the "mighty Medes"; becoming feasible later due to "rising of Cyrus", who captured ^L*Iš-tu-me-gu*, LUGAL ^{LU}ERIN-*manda*. Then the Babylonian king merely "remembers" a past, *before* his Tema departure in particular. The "exact" date of Medians' defeat wasn't known to Babylonians who just knew that it had been taken place "before" the Median's evacuation of Harran. Neither the Babylonian nor the historical report of the fall of Medes imply a more-than-a-year interval from the rise of Cyrus to the capture of Astyages. Herodotus e.g. says that after the unexpected quirk of Harpagos to the Persians, the surprised Astyages mobilized "the last men left with him in the city and went for war with Cyrus". The time elapsed since the fugitive Harpagos initiative to the capture of Astyages couldn't be more than half a year and therefore the event should be occurred in 554BC, i.e., before the beginning of Nabonidus 3rd year; as he relates in Sippar that Cyrus rose and defeated the Medes, "while the «3rd year» was about to begin" (*ša-lu-ul-ti šatti ina ka-ša-du ina*; literary "was coming"). This is in contradiction with the usual dating tradition of chronicle, where every clause begins with the standard expression of MU xKAM, "Nth year". Herodotus also makes it clear that the fall of Media and that of Lydia were back-to-back; and interval between the two seems to be "the least" possible. The capture of Sardis took place by the beginning of winter; while the chronicle 9th-year clause relates a campaign of Cyrus in the upper Tigris valley, to be concluded a month later, in "spring": Thus the two events should be different. The fall of Sardis fits with the winter of 551/50, 3-years after that of Medes, as implied from Herodotus I, 90, giving rise to *immediate* adoption of Ionian Architecture in Pasargadae. There Cyrus had not previously employed another style to be substituted later by that of Ionians; Making possible the completion of Pasargadae's constructions before the Babylonian expedition [with the absence of Babylonian-influenced elements there: the winged-genius relief of palace-R is not copied from the Phoenician originals of their homeland after fall of Babylon and rather, as the rest of palace-S relives, originates from the ivory Phoenician artefacts in Assyria, including a design of the Egyptian *horos*]. The central Asian campaign of Cyrus fits from 545 to 543; as his name became attached to his own city during his lifetime; otherwise no trace of the name survived due to later developments of Persian period. This makes both a "late" central Asian campaign as improbable and the final fatal war of Cyrus as unlikely: The story was a fiction provided to make *Cyrus logos* in concordance with the elements of Greek tragedy and hero's demise as a consequence of his *hybris*: a pure Greek concept employed for the Persian king. A "late" eastern campaign of Cyrus in such a non-productive land of Massagetae is in contradiction with some historical facts; as for a long-range campaign, Egypt was no-doubt a strict priority for a ~70 years-old Cyrus, who apparently confided its conquest to Cambyses. Finally, the idea of "incompletely left Palace-P" of Cyrus is based on a highly popular hypothesis, led astray by attributing the invention of OP script to Darius, who would name himself as an inaugural "Ariyan-inscription-holder" king and not merely as a king who reproduced Bisitun text in "Ariyan" as well, "which was not carved on clay and on parchment *in-advance*" ["implicitly" in Aramaic; as it was the case for Elamite and the Akkadian versions, while not for OP, which was to be copied "on the spot" from the original OP Royal statements *in Aramaic alphabet* on clay or parchment. The usual interpretation of a non-existent OP *before* DB makes no sense]. Thus the "traditional" date of fall of the Medes in 550BC, based on an assumed identification of the 6th year clause of the Nabonidus chronicle with the actual date of the collapse of Astyages just postdates the real time of the event for 4 to 5 years; and the 550BC "barrier" should be crossed away towards a further past indeed!